

June 28, 1989

Dear Betty,

How kind of you to take the time to write to me. I enjoyed your letter very much. I'm glad you are finding the time to spend with your dad. What would he do without you? I've always loved him because from the time I was a kid he was always kind and supportive of me. That was very important to me at a time when many others (relatives included) made frequent remarks or innuendo about my masculinity. It was time of a lot of inner turmoil for me, but I was always treated with respect by your father.

It has been a year and nine months since I was diagnosed with AIDS, but I had been sick for a year before that. So I knew what was happening to me. At that time there just seemed to be nothing that could be done about it but wait for the "inevitable." So when the diagnosis came it was somewhat of a relief. It also provided some justification to go on disability, stop hiding my disease, and to start taking better care of myself.

Since that time I have been physically challenged to one extent or another, and there were times when I had high fevers and pneumonia that I thought I might not ever come home from the hospital. But I have never given up and never accepted my diagnosis as an automatic death sentence. From August 1988 until April of this year I was hospitalized 7 times in one crisis or another. But since then I have had a period of relative well-being—a few chronic low-grade infections but nothing life-threatening. I have put back most of the lost weight, and my energy level is much improved.

I think that the most important part of my therapy has been the love and support that I have received from every conceivable corner. One of the things that I feared most prior to diagnosis was that I might become socially isolated and alone as a result of my illness. But from the time that I announced my diagnosis (it was covered in the papers here) I have been overwhelmed by the out-pouring of support. The gay and lesbian community has been incredible in showing their love and concern. It has come from long-time friends and associates as well as from total strangers. Cards, letters, visits at home or in the hospital, food—either brought to my home, or taking me out to lunch or dinner. One man sends his maid over every couple weeks to clean my apartment. Others have done laundry, grocery shopped, and washed my car during the periods when I was very weak and short of breath.

I have further been blessed with the love of my work as a gay liberationist and community organizer. Even on days when I feel bad I can get my mind off myself by immersing myself in some project. Last August when I was hospitalized with an attack of pneumocystis pneumonia, I had my neighbor bring my typewriter in, I dispatched someone else to the post office for a roll of stamps, and cranked out 70 letters appealing for support of "San Diego Walks For Life" (our AIDS walkathon). As a result I raised \$2000 in sponsorships, making me the second-highest fundraiser for the Walk that year. I was very pleased at the response.

As you can see from the enclosed articles, my latest project is the Lesbian & Gay Archives of San Diego which I founded shortly after my diagnosis. I had been wanting to do it for years, but my state of health had produced a renewed sense of urgency. We have a committee of about 15 men and women who share my vision for

building our own library, art gallery, archives, lecture hall, and all-purpose cultural center. They are a grand bunch who look after me like mother hens. They often accuse me of working too hard and insist that I take regular rest periods. It is wonderful to be surrounded by such caring people.

Ironically, AIDS has brought some benefits to my life. We all tend to plunge head-long through life as if we think we are immortal, putting off forever many of those things which might improve the quality of life. As I began to make changes in my life to be prepared for dying, I found that learning to die is very much like learning to live. Consequently, I have found an inner peace and an excitement with life that I've never known. I've learned to love myself, forgive myself, love others, forgive others. My relationships are tranquil, rewarding and fulfilling. I don't spend much time thinking about the future, but rather being thankful for the level of well-being that I have in the present. For me, A-I-D-S now stands for Another Interesting Day Starts.

There are a growing number of people who have recovered from AIDS. But for some reason, they get very little attention from the press. I expect to be one of the survivors. I am not waiting for medical science to "save" me. When my healing comes it will have to come from within. And I'm working on that part on a daily basis.

I know that all of this has been very stressful to my mother, and I am very sorry about that. But I simply could not bring myself to keep her in the dark and lie about my life when there is so much joy, productivity and pride in it. I think it would be very cruel to tell her nothing and possibly have her face, without warning, the news of my death. Though I have no intention of dying of AIDS, I would have to be in a severe state of denial to ignore the possibility of that event.

The reason for telling you all of this, is so that you will not think of my situation as a gloomy one or think of me as a dying person. I am, quite frankly, having the time of my life. I hope that, with this information, you will be able to be supportive and comforting of Ida if the need should ever arise. If she needs to cry, let her do it. I've certainly done my share of it in the past few years, and I find it a very cleansing experience. One other point. As far as I am concerned, there is no need to be secretive about my diagnosis. Secrecy and denial only perpetuate the stigma. I am a proud gay man and I apologize for nothing. Mom knows that and is proud of me. She is a great lady and I daily give thanks that I drew her for a mother.

And speaking of relatives, you're not such a bad cousin. I thank you for that and for your continued support of me and for your kindnesses to my mother. Those things are highly valued and they do make a difference.

Love to you,

Bob (Jesse)